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Tuesday, 18 September 2018, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Jeffrey	(United States of America)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mrs. Cordova Soria
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/845)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/845)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/845, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) .

I now give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura: I welcome you to the Security Council, Mr. President. I am delighted to see you here, in view of your new important role, which in my opinion has already shown the further engagement of your country in this complex environment. I thank you for being here and for presiding over this meeting.

Let me start with yesterday's developments on Idlib. They are important. As Council members know, Idlid has been a major source of concern for all of us in thic Chamber and beyond. Yesterday, Russian President Putin and Turkish President Erdoğan reached an agreement to establish a demilitarized zone within the Idlib de-escalation zone. The Government of Syria has welcomed the agreement — as we saw recently — and confirmed its full coordination with the Russian Federation in that regard.

We in the Secretariat — and I believe the Secretary-General has also been very clear on this — welcome the fact that diplomacy has produced progress in the effort to address the challenges posed by Security Council-listed terrorist groups while protecting civilians — up to 3 million of them, including 1 million children. This represents the squaring of a very difficult circle. I therefore thank President Putin and President Erdoğan for their personal engagement. We had hoped that they would hold that meeting, and that meeting took place and produced a very important outcome.

I also believe that the strong international engagement on the dangers of a full-scale offensive in Idlib has been important. I thank everyone here because I know they have strongly raised that issue, together with my colleagues and friend Mark Lowcock. I commend members of Syrian civil society for raising their voice. There are 3 million of them. They have been raising their voices. In fact, just yesterday, for instance, I received a letter signed by more than 13,000 women from Idlib, calling for protection and security for their families and reminding us that they are civilians. We therefore hope that this agreement will be expeditiously implemented in full respect for international humanitarian law; with sustained humanitarian access; with respect for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria; and with continued preference for dialogue — such as yesterday's — over escalation in addressing a complex situation.

In that context, let met also note that, just as we are seeing crisis in Idlib averted, which is very good news, we are seeing worrying military activities elsewhere. Overnight, a Russian military aircraft was downed, killing 15 servicemen. The Russian Ministry of Defence has stated that the plane was accidentally downed by Syrian Government anti-aircraft fire, which was responding to Israeli fighter jets carrying out attacks just off the coast. The Government of Syria has stated that Israelli jets struck a Government facility near Latakia. Russia has blamed Israel for this. Israel has stated that Israeli jets were targeting weapons shipments headed for Lebanon that threatened Israeli security, and has blamed the Syrian Government for the incident. We call upon all parties to refrain from military actions that would only exacerbate an already complex situation, especially now that we are receiving

such positive news regarding what could have been a dramatic military escalation.

But for now, we are pleased that there is de-escalation in one major area: Idlib. And now that we have this deal, there is no reason not to move forward expeditiously with the political process. Let me turn to that process and take stock of where we stand.

Syrians look to the United Nations to facilitate a political process that can help them exit this war and enter into a better future — a future that they determine, independently and democratically. That will require a real dialogue and genuine negotiation — a process that is credible and inclusive. My guide is and will always be resolution 2254 (2015), which mandates the United Nations to facilitate the political process. Together with my team, I have always looked for creative ways to advance resolution 2254 (2015) in light of the many political and military developments taking place all the time — a rollercoaster — but always with a view to ensuring that the political process is credible and addresses the real issues that divide Syrians. That brings me to the constitutional committee.

The Secretary-General dispatched me to the Syrian Congress of National Dialogue in Sochi seven and a half months ago. It was a carefully considered decision, made after special consultations in Vienna with the Syrian parties and with the Russian Federation — and not just by me, but involving the Secretary-General himself, too. Based on those consultations, the United Nations had reason to believe that Sochi would contribute to accelerating the Geneva process. Its outcome was to be brought back to Geneva as a core component of the wider political process, and the final terms of a constitutional committee were to be facilitated by the United Nations in Geneva.

True to this spirit, since the Sochi Congress I have worked carefully to facilitate the establishment of a Syrian-owned, Syrian-led, United Nations-facilitated constitutional committee. I have consulted particularly closely with Iran, Russia and Turkey, given what is logically their particular interest — given that they were in Sochi — and responsibility to help make the Sochi outcomes meaningful. Of course, I have also consulted widely, including with the members of the so-called small group and others, too. And I have been continuously available and listening to Syrians — the Government, all parts of the opposition and many others too, inside and outside Syria.

In these consultations, a formula on participation gained acceptance. One-third of delegates would be the Government delegation; one-third would be a broadly represented opposition delegation; and a middle third would be, as the Sochi final statement clearly says: "Syrian experts, civil society, independents, tribal leaders and women". It became clear that each third could comprise 50 members, and from each 50, 15 could be identified to play a particular role as regards drafting a constitutional reform. This, when combined with clear rules of procedure, would be a package to launch a credible and inclusive process for drafting a constitutional reform.

Based on this formula, three lists have emerged: the list of the Government delegation, with Russia and Iran's support; the list of a broadly represented opposition delegation, with Turkey's support and that of other States as well; and, crucially, a middle third list that, consistent with resolution 2254 (2015) and Sochi, is clearly my duty and responsibility to facilitate and then to finalize. In our modest opinion, the middle third list currently on the table meets the criteria outlined in the Sochi statement. I also ensured that it was something that the United Nations could support in terms of credibility and international legitimacy.

This meant selecting experts with critical technical expertise — we are talking about constitutions — and experience in constitution-drafting. It meant including Syrians from different ethnic, religious and geographical backgrounds; those from both inside and outside of Syria; and those who are known to be bridge-builders. It also meant ensuring that a minimum of 30 per cent across the entire 150 experts were women. One overarching consideration is the need for a balance in the middle third. No particular leaning should totally dominate; this will be a core component of the credibility of the committee.

In addition, after having consulted the Astana guarantors, I offered suggestions and options on the mandate, chairing, steering and decision-making — we have a lot of training and experience in that at the United Nations. These were designed to offer a minimum set of procedural points that would allow the Syrians to meet productively and progress in a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned, United Nations-facilitated process.

At the start of this month, I said we were getting closer to a moment of truth. All opportunities had been offered to canvass all issues thoroughly, including via

teams from my Office who visited Moscow, Ankara, Tehran and other capitals. I convened the Astana trio on 10 and 11 September in Geneva in an effort to move ahead. At that meeting, some issues became clear. For instance, the Government list is not contested, nor is the opposition list. This is important, but I have to admit that my team and I were disappointed that the middle third list — the list for which I have a particular responsibility — was significantly questioned. Approaches were suggested that I found to be inconsistent with the credibility and legitimacy needed for a United Nations-facilitated process. Meanwhile, while issues such as chairing and voting were canvassed, a lot was left unresolved regarding rules of procedure.

The Astana guarantors proposed that we continue technical talks on the middle third list before another meeting in Geneva in October. While I really have no problem with such technical meetings, let me be clear. The middle third list needs be balanced and credible to Syrians from all sides and to the international community. As per resolution 2254 (2015) and the Sochi final statement, it is the United Nations and the Geneva process that facilitate and finalize the way forward. Moreover, there is an urgency to move forward and move ahead. We cannot afford to keep constantly consulting each other.

This was — and is — my message to the Astana trio. I gave the exact same message when I met the members of the so-called small group, namely, Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. On 14 September in Geneva, I told them where we were in the process and welcomed their support. I made it clear to them, just I had to the Astana trio, that they should not seek to intervene in issues that are basically for the United Nations to facilitate — neither the lists, the rules of procedure nor the substance of the process — beyond what is in resolution 2254 (2015) and the 12 principles developed in the Geneva process and endorsed in Sochi.

It is too easy to say, "we will keep consulting". If we are not careful, this will become an end in itself. What Syrians want to know is when a credible process will start. As far as I am concerned, all the pieces are in place for that to happen; we could start in one week. If everyone supports the United Nations-led process and recognizes the need for it to be balanced and credible with sensible rules of procedure, we can move ahead very fast. Indeed, I believe that the time is approaching for me to indicate a fixed date by which the Sochi final statement is given effect by launching the constitutional committee.

This next month will therefore be critical. I am ready to engage everyone. In addition to the international players, I of course look forward to engaging the Syrian parties, starting with the Syrian Government. Their active involvement is obviously crucial if a constitutional committee is to proceed. I will also need to engage with the opposition and a wide range of Syrian voices. Above all, I want to move beyond the current preparations and see a genuinely Syrian-led, Syrian-owned constitutional committee up and running for the good of Syria and Syrians as a core component of a credible political process. This is what we have. The political process has been reduced to one very important thing, which is the constitutional committee, along with a safe and neutral environment and elections. These are very important and sufficient to make a difference.

Let us not underestimate the importance of this. There is a need to see Syrians start to talk to each other, which can take place within the constitutional committee. There is a need to find steps that can build confidence and that can, in time, create a safe, calm and neutral environment. At a time when there is an effort to focus on refugees and rehabilitation, let us not forget that without a meaningful and irreversible political process and without real steps on the ground, the confidence required may not develop.

I cannot fail to remind the Council here of the need for urgent, concrete actions on the release of detainees and abductees, the hand-over of bodies and the identification of missing persons, all of which are crucial issues that affect thousands of Syrians. Let us also remember that we must ultimately prepare for United Nations-supervised presidential and parliamentary elections, with all Syrians inside and outside Syria participating, as called for in resolution 2254 (2015).

Last week, I was honoured — like many of my colleagues — to attend Kofi Annan's funeral. As the first United Nations Special Envoy on the Syrian conflict, he emphasized some fundamental points: a political, not military solution — this is what we see in Idlib, as it moves in this direction — with one United Nations-led process of mediation, based on inclusion and consent and backed by a united Security Council.

He offered the first way out — the six-point plan and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) — but could not carry the effort forward when the Council was not united. This was a bitter price that had to be paid; we all know what happened. Sadly, it was a greatly missed opportunity, as Kofi Annan reminded me.

Much has changed since then, but we all agree that there is no military solution in Idlib or anywhere else. We need an inclusive political process and the United Nations is here to facilitate that process, starting with a constitutional committee getting to work. However, it must be credible, because only thus can the United Nations invest it with the legitimacy it needs. I ask all concerned to give the United Nations facilitation in the coming weeks — by that I mean in October — their full support.

The President: I thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lowcock.

Mr. Lowcock: As the Council is aware, I was in Damascus three weeks ago for talks with the Government. We had constructive discussions on a range of issues. Across much of the country, the situation is now calmer than it was when I last visited in January.

However, humanitarian needs remain substantial and the Government expressed concern to me about the underfunding of the United Nations humanitarian response plan this year. I said that, in my judgment, addressing that would require improvement in needs assessment and access for humanitarian agencies, including my own Office, to assure both current and potential donors that help is genuinely targeted, in a neutral and impartial way, at the people in greatest need and, indeed, that such help reaches those same people.

Since the visit, of course, we have been totally focused on the danger that the looming Idlib catastrophe may totally upend our humanitarian agenda. As Mr. De Mistura has said, we welcome yesterday's news from Sochi. I want to be clear with the Council about what was at stake.

From the Secretary-General down, we have consistently expressed alarm over the risks of a full-scale military offensive in north-west Syria. It was no exaggeration, merely a statement of fact, that such an onslaught would likely have presaged the worst humanitarian tragedy of the twenty-first century. Surveys of affected people undertaken last month showed that well over 2 million people could have been displaced in the event of a full-scale military operation. It would have meant further untold suffering of vulnerable and terrified people from overcrowded sites in which basic services have been stretched to breaking point for months. There simply is no way for humanitarian agencies to protect and meet the needs of millions of extremely vulnerable people, including, as Mr. De Mistura reminded us, 1 million children, in the midst of a massive military onslaught. We therefore welcome yesterday's agreement because, if sustained and implemented in full respect of international humanitarian law, it may avert the catastrophe we have been warning against.

To succeed, demilitarization requires the agreement of all parties. Short of such agreement, it is foreseeable that force would be used to demilitarize, and thus civilians would be exposed to the very harm we are trying to avoid. Whether from within or outside the proposed demilitarized area, should civilians deem it necessary to leave, they must be allowed to seek refuge elsewhere. In case of displacement, all possible measures must be taken so that affected civilians are received under satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition, and that members of the same family are not separated.

It is also important that any screening to distinguish civilians from fighters be undertaken in accordance with international humanitarian law and clear standard operating procedures, while ensuring humane treatment and accounting for those who have been screened. Special protection and assistance measures should be in place for civilians, in particular women and children, who have been associated with, or are family members of, fighters. Regardless of location — whether within or outside the demilitarized zone — international humanitarian law obligations continue to apply. Warring parties cannot deliberately or carelessly disregard the distinction between civilians and combatants, or between civilian infrastructure and military objectives.

The United Nations, along with other humanitarian organizations, continues to implement a major humanitarian assistance programme from across the border in Turkey, as mandated by Council resolutions. On average, we are reaching 2 million people each month in north-west Syria. This week alone, food for more than 260,000 people is being sent across the border,

as are non-food items and tents for more than 60,000 people — most of it through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing into Idlib. Aid is also being prepositioned to ensure that those in need can continue to receive support in the face of further military escalation. Food rations for one week for more than 350,000 people and non-food items for 400,000 people have already been prepositioned in Idlib. Supplies have also been prepositioned in Homs, Aleppo and Latakia governorates, including food assistance for up to 1 million people and shelter kits and non-food items for up to 300,000 people. Hardly any of that would have been possible had the Council not renewed the provisions of resolution 2165 (2014) when it adopted resolution 2393 (2017), in December 2017. The resolution made a real difference, and millions of people depend on the activities it mandates.

The humanitarian situation in other parts of the country remains difficult. At Rukban, on the Syria-Jordan border, the United Nations, in cooperation with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, remains ready to provide humanitarian assistance through an inter-agency convoy. What we need is official approval from the Government of Syria for the convoy to proceed and for the teams to accompany the convoy to deliver life-saving supplies and carry out needs assessment and distribution monitoring. We also need deconfliction and guarantees of safe passage from the Government of Syria, the Russian Federation, international coalition forces and the Government of Jordan. And we need written guarantees of safe passage by all non-State armed groups controlling the camp and present along the route.

Further to the north, some 153,000 people are now estimated to have returned to Raqqa city since October 2017, although conditions remain unconducive for returns because of high levels of destruction and explosive hazard contamination. Efforts have been made to scale up the mine action response since earlier this year, including mine risk education activities and training. Humanitarian mine action organizations have also been carrying out mine removal operations in Raqqa city since June, focusing on key infrastructure, with a coordination mechanism available to include sites prioritized by the humanitarian community. However, much more needs to be done before the city is safe and conducive for returns.

In Deir ez-Zor, attention appears to have turned now to the last remaining enclave of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in Syria, along the east bank of the Euphrates river in the southern parts of the governorate. That includes the towns of Hajin, Al-Soussa, Al-Sha'afa and Al-Baghouz. There are significant concerns for the safety and security of civilians living in those areas, with more than 20,000 people estimated to be displaced and reports of leaflets being dropped to warn civilians to leave before the start of the offensive. I call on parties once again to avoid civilian loss by respecting their international humanitarian law obligations of distinction, proportionality and precaution, and to allow civilians who wish to leave to move safely to other areas.

In the south-west of the country, most of the up to 325,000 people estimated to have been displaced in the area since late June are now reported to have returned to their areas of origin. But thousands still remained displaced and high levels of humanitarian need persist, including among returnees. The United Nations has continued to provide humanitarian aid in the area, with the agreement of the Government and in partnership with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and other humanitarian organizations, with efforts ongoing to ensure more sustained access across the area. That is urgently needed to address gaps issuing from the suspension of cross-border activities from Jordan in late June.

Let me finish with a final word on Idlib. What do we think the 3 million civilians, including those 1 million children, confined to Idlib make of yesterday's agreement? Well, they have a simple question: Is this merely a stay of execution or is it the beginning of a reprieve, the first tiny glint of light at the very end of the darkest tunnel?

The President: I thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my national capacity as the Secretary of State's Special Representative for Syria Engagement, and at the invitation of Ambassador Haley. I thank her for her leadership to support the people of Syria and her invitation to be present here today.

I thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for their briefings.

Before I continue, I would like to express sorrow to our Security Council partner Russia for the tragic loss of life when the Russian plane was downed yesterday. The unfortunate incident reminds us of the need to find

a permanent, peaceful and political resolution to the conflict, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

For 3 million Syrians, Idlib is their last hope for refugee from the Al-Assad regime's reign of terror, as we just heard from the Under-Secretary-General. Those people know Al-Assad's brutality all too well. That is because many of them, 1.4 million of them to be exact, already fled their homes before.

One of those people is a 24-year-old woman named Hiba.

Hiba and her family left the town of eastern Ghouta in March. At that time, the Secretary-General described the assault on eastern Ghouta as "hell on Earth". Hiba and her family were forced to flee to Idlib, hoping to find a place where they would not have to fear for their lives. But now Hiba is on the front line once again. As she told a reporter,

> "We saw enough bombing in eastern Ghouta. I cried so much when I heard the warplanes again. There is nowhere to take shelter."

It is for Hiba, for the 3 million civilians struggling alongside her in Idlib and for all her fellow citizens across Syria and in the diaspora that we need to see not just another stop-gap arrangement but a lasting ceasefire that paves the way for a credible political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva process.

As President Trump has stated, Bashar Al-Assad of Syria must not recklessly attack Idlib. There is no military solution to this conflict. Russia wants the world to believe that after a military campaign everything will go back to the way it used to be. That is why they ask for the three Rs: recognition of the regime, reconstruction money and pushing Syria's neighbours to send refugees home before it is safe to do so, trying to sweep the past seven years of violence under the rug. Let us be serious. Al-Assad and the henchmen who unleashed these atrocities will never be welcome in the world of civilized nations. They will get no help to rebuild, certainly not from us. I cannot imagine that any other Government would want to explain to its people why it would send aid to the barbaric Al-Assad regime.

There will not be stability in Syria as long as Iran and its proxy forces remain. Those groups are responsible for some of the most egregious violence in this war. They have directed the regime's starve-and-surrender campaign. They are now on Israel's doorstep. That is unacceptable. Iran cannot dictate the future for the Syrian people. If Russia is interested in bringing peace to Syria, it should make sure that Iran and its militias leave Syria once and for all. The risk of a broader conflict will leave with them.

Iran is responsible for creating the Syria we see today: a broken and violent country. The Syrian people know full well who did this to them. No one will forget. We must prevent the people of Syria from facing yet another catastrophe at the hands of the Al-Assad regime, and the only way forward is a lasting ceasefire, as called for in resolution 2254 (2015).

Yesterday, as we just heard, Russia and Turkey agreed to stabilize the situation in Idlib. We call on all parties to commit to a lasting ceasefire and to take immediate steps to advance the Geneva peace process further. Again, the only way forward is a genuine and inclusive political solution.

Last week, I and others met with Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura to determine how we advance the Geneva political process. That has to be our focus. We need talks that stick to the road map for a new constitution and elections in line with resolution 2254 (2015). The United States is fully committed to that effort, which is why I am here today to support Ambassador Haley and her team here in New York.

In our view, Special Envoy De Mistura should therefore immediately move forward as he has laid out, with the convening of a constitutional committee in keeping with his mandate. We have been discussing such a committee since January. We understand that Russia, back at the beginning, told us that it was fully on board and promised that the committee would fully support the United Nations Geneva process. As Mr. De Mistura said, it is urgent to move forward now. The United Nations should therefore set a date for the first meeting of the committee and move forward with creating such a new constitution. We should hear back from the United Nations on its progress by 31 October. I urge other Security Council partners to support such an approach.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I also want to express my condolences to Russia for the recent loss of life, which

adds to the list of immeasurable losses of life in Syria and highlights the need for an urgent political solution.

I speak on behalf of Sweden and Kuwait.

I would first like to thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing on the humanitarian situation and the humanitarian assistance provided by the United Nations in very difficult circumstances. We reiterate our call for safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access to all in need across Syria, including to areas that have recently changed control. The reports of the Secretary-General continue to be clear that all methods of delivery, including cross-border aid, are essential to the effective provision of humanitarian assistance and to ensuring a needs-based response. We also reiterate our calls on all donors to contribute generously to the underfunded Syria appeals.

We would like to focus our remarks yet again on Idlib, and thank Staffan De Mistura and Mr. Lowcock for keeping us up to date on the different aspects of the extremely serious situation there, and of the intensive work of the United Nations to prevent what we have been warned could be the biggest humanitarian catastrophe of this century.

We received reports that there were days without airstrikes last week, which shows that, when there is political will, a cessation of hostilities can be achieved. We are encouraged by the statements from the meeting in Sochi yesterday, and we hope that a cessation of hostilities in Idlib will now ensue and be respected by all and that dialogue rather than military escalation will prevail. That is also required in order to succeed with efforts to separate terrorist groups as designated by the Security Council from armed opposition groups. We would appreciate receiving more information on the agreement made in Sochi today, including on the implementation of a demilitarized zone to be established by 15 October and reassurances of an immediate cessation of hostilities. We also welcome Special Envoy De Mistura's work in that regard, and we encourage coordination between ongoing efforts where relevant.

Counter-terrorism measures in no way relieve the parties of their very clear obligations under international law, which are applicable throughout Idlib and Syria. The Secretary-General last week called on the Astana guarantors

> "to find a way to isolate terrorist groups and create a situation in which civilians will not be the price paid to solve the problem of Idlib".

That is as true for Idlib as it is true across Syria.

Over the past few weeks, in meeting after meeting, Sweden and Kuwait, together with the vast majority of Security Council members, have consistently called on the Astana guarantors to implement their own de-escalation agreement in Idlib. We will continue that preventative diplomacy, and we repeat our calls today that Syria and its allies must refrain from escalating violence in Idlib, ensure humanitarian access and full freedom of movement for all persons and abide by all their obligations under international law. Civilians and civilian objects must be protected, and all parties are obliged to apply the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. All those obligations apply across Idlib and in all of Syria, inside and outside any demilitarized zone. The very clear demands on the parties to the conflict in resolution 2401 (2018) likewise remain in place.

We also express our grave concern over new reports of attacks on medical facilities despite deconfliction, for example, the case of the 6 September bombing of the medical facility in Kafar Zita. Such attacks may amount to war crimes. There can be no impunity for violations and abuses of international law, and we reaffirm our strong support for the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism and the Commission of Inquiry in that regard. We also support the call by Under-Secretary-General Lowcock to all parties to abide by deconfliction protocols.

We also appreciate the update by Special Envoy De Mistura on the United Nations-led political process and his tireless efforts in that regard. We agree with him on how resolution 2254 (2015) is intrinsically linked to how to solve the situation in Idlib. Incentives are needed for the day after separation, both for armed groups and for the civilian population. Such incentives can come only from a genuine diplomatic effort on the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

It is therefore urgent to make progress on the political process in parallel. We lend our full support to the United Nations mandate to establish the constitutional committee and prerogative to ensure its credibility and international legitimacy. Women's full and effective participation in the work of the committee must be ensured. We call on all involved to respect the

independent middle list created by the United Nations, and we encourage the Special Envoy to convene the committee as soon as possible, as he indicated.

Let us all be clear: a full-scale military operation in Idlib would risk any remaining hope for a sustainable and peaceful settlement in Syria. Only once a credible political transition is firmly under way, and when conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons are in place, will the international donor community be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria.

The responsibility — and ability — to avoid a catastrophe and allow time for dialogue still lies with Syria and the Astana guarantors. As co-penholders for the Syria humanitarian file, Kuwait and Sweden will continue to ensure that the Council follows developments in Idlib very closely. We continue to be actively exploring all options for the Security Council. We stand ready to work with all Council members and the relevant actors on the best way forward. Enough blood has been shed. All efforts should now be political and diplomatic.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I wish to join the other speakers in expressing my deepest condolences to the Russian Federation with respect to the event just mentioned.

I thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and Mark Lowcock for their exemplary commitment and their briefings, which not only make clear the gravity of the current situation but also illustrate the potential that exists today for a way out of this crisis.

Syria is today at a crossroads: it can either spiral further into military escalation in Idlib, which would begin one of the darkest chapters of the Syrian tragedy, or it could instead take the path of genuine political engagement towards resolving the conflict. Both scenarios, the darkest and the most encouraging, are possible at this point. The decision largely depends upon the Security Council's ability to unite around peace — on option that is today, despite the immense the immense challenges, within our reach.

Syria is once again on a precipice, with an offensive threatening the Idlib area for the past several weeks, where more than 3 million people are now located. Locations there have already been subjected to shelling, tens of thousands of civilians have fled the indiscriminate strikes and yet worse still could be to come. Several hospitals have been the targets of attack. We cannot reiterate it too much: attacks against health personnel and hospitals constitute war crimes and their perpetrators will have to answer for their actions. The fight against terrorism is in no circumstance an adequate argument to justify such a disaster. Indiscriminate attacks represent not only a humanitarian outrage but also acts of strategic folly, serving only to fuel the terrorism they purport to fight. Syria has therefore become the pre-eminent incubator of terrorism. An offensive in Idlib would have the same effect and, furthermore, contribute to dispersing the jihadist fighters there across the region, potentially to Europe and beyond.

France has deployed tireless efforts in all forums, on all fronts, in seeking with its partners ways to avert disaster. A four-party meeting was held last Friday among the diplomatic Councillors of Turkey, Russia, Germany and France, with a view to finding common ground between the small group and the Astana group. In our view, that is an unavoidable path. Turkey has made significant efforts to contribute to concrete solutions. While we note the agreement announced yesterday by Presidents Erdoğan and Putin regarding the establishment of a demilitarized zone in the Idlib area, we call on Turkey and Russia to specify the parameters, such as the fate and movements of terrorist groups designated by the Security Council.

In that context, when we want to believe that diplomacy is finally regaining ground, we must persevere in our joint efforts to persuade all parties to the conflict that there are alternatives to escalation and that the path of dialogue is the only way to deliver on a lasting solution to the situation in Idlib.

The protection of civilians must be an absolute priority for all stakeholders. It is incumbent upon all parties to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, in particular pursuant to the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. We must also do everything possible to protect humanitarian and medical facilities and personnel and to ensure safe, full and unimpeded humanitarian access to populations in need. I should like to recall the unique and crucial nature of cross-border humanitarian assistance, which in August alone provided vital daily assistance to nearly 750,000 individuals in the north-west.

We continue to support Turkey's efforts to find a negotiated solution in Idlib. We commend its

commitment, like that of the United Nations, which is making a real difference. It is the very future of Syria that is at stake. How is it possible to simultaneously hope for the return of refugees and prepare for an offensive that could displace hundreds of thousands of people? How is it possible to generate the necessary trust for a credible political process at a time when the population of Idlib continues to be threatened by a brutal military campaign? How can we call for the rebuilding of Syria at the same time as preparing to destroy Idlib and there exists no credible and irreversible political process? The reality is that there can be no military solution in Syria. An offensive in Idlib would further destroy hope for peace in Syria. I repeat it once again: we will tolerate no further use of chemical weapons in Syria, and we stand ready to respond.

Avoiding an escalation in Idlib is all the more necessary given that a credible negotiated political solution acceptable to all is within our grasp. That is my firm belief. This option was generated by United Nations mediation. The discussions held last week in Geneva should lead to the prompt establishment of the constitutional committee, the first component of a political process endorsed by the international community, including the Security Council, through resolution 2254 (2015). The small group, which met with the Special Envoy on Friday, expressed its full support for those efforts. However, the Asana guarantors have expressed reservations regarding the composition of the constitutional committee established by Special Envoy, despite the mandate entrusted to him by the Sochi final statement of 31 January.

France firmly believes that the time has come to move forward with the setting up of the constitutional committee by Mr. De Mistura as soon as possible. That is the call I wish to issue today on behalf of France, echoing, and supporting, the message Mr. Mistura has just delivered to us. An imminent date is needed for that work to begin. I recall that participants in the Sochi congress agreed that the Special Envoy would be responsible for the committee's composition under the Geneva process. Those commitments must be upheld. The Special Envoy must be in a position to update us on his progress at the next Council meeting on this matter, and the constitutional committee should finally be able to meet as soon as possible. In our view, that is key to building real political momentum. We all are aware that the road ahead is long and difficult; that is the very reason for our call: not one minute do we have to waste.

A political solution does not begin and end with the drafting of a new constitution; detailed discussions must now begin on its many other elements, such as modalities for the adoption of a new constitutional text; the holding of free and transparent elections in which all Syrians, including refugees and displaced persons, can vote; and, more broadly, the creation of a safe and neutral environment, underpinned by confidence-building measures, which is integral for granting the necessary credibility to the entire process.

Our road map has been clearly laid out: a strong commitment to a cessation of hostilities in Idlib; the continuation of the political process, with collective support for the launch of the constitutional committee's work as the first step; and the unity of the Council around a constructive political agenda with a view to a peaceful and agreed upon resolution to the conflict. It is France's unambiguous position that the rebuilding of Syria can be envisioned only on that basis, once an irreversible, credible and inclusive political transition has begun. Let us be clear: without a guarantee that such a transition is under way, no Syrians will believe that their country has changed and the vast majority of them will refuse to return home, dooming any hope of lasting peace in Syria.

In conclusion, I would like to stress our belief that the Security Council has a special responsibility to break the cycle of tragedy in Syria and to generate genuine political momentum. On behalf of France, I call on the Council to rally around that shared political goal by supporting the Geneva process, the Special Envoy and an inclusive political settlement.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): We express our heartfelt condolences to Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia for the loss of life of Russian servicemen yesterday. We also extend those condolences to his Government and the families of the victims.

We must be aware that the situation in Idlib, and in Syria in general, requires strong diplomatic capacity at the highest level to stop the massacre and objectively manage the flow of displaced persons. That is why, despite the very confrontational positions expressed at the Tehran summit, the Government of Equatorial Guinea welcomes the signing of the memorandum on the stabilization of the Idlib de-escalation zone, which was agreed yesterday in Sochi by President Putin and President Erdoğan. That memorandum is

aimed at rejecting a large-scale military offensive, which we have been anticipating since the beginning of September owing to the intensification of air and land attacks, which have led to dozens of deaths, injuries and displacements, as well as the destruction of civilian infrastructure. As the signatories pointed out, that Russian-Turkish agreement seeks to create a demilitarized zone in Idlib patrolled by soldiers of both countries by 15 October and should make it possible to separate the Government forces from the opposition forces, to withdraw heavy weapons starting on 10 October and to re-establish road transport between Aleppo and the towns of Latakia and Hama before the end of 2018. All that means that the Russian-Turkish talks must prevent the Syrian army from carrying out a major military offensive, which would lead to the loss of many civilian lives in Idlib.

We congratulate the Governments of the Russian Federation and Turkey for that noble diplomatic effort, and the Syrian Government for having supported that agreement and stated that it is prepared to implement its provisions.

That decision, which should be aimed at strengthening the ceasefire, improving the humanitarian situation and seeking a long-term political solution to the conflict, is perfectly in line with the mandate and work of the international mediator for Syria, Special Envoy De Mistura. We would like to thank him for his tireless work, which hled to the Sochi agreement. My Government hopes that the meetings held by Mr. De Mistura with representatives of 10 countries of the International Syria Contact Group on 10, 11 and 14 September in Geneva will finally lead to the creation of an intra-Syrian constitutional committee and that the guarantors of Astana will not present any impediment to the constitutional proposal put forward by Mr. De Mistura. That proposal is essential for the holding of elections in the post-war period with a view to legitimizing a political process in which all the political actors of the country must participate.

The fact that the Syrian conflict will not end with this battle justifies the need to prioritize a political solution in Idlib. The Islamic State continues to maintain a small redoubt on the border with Iraq, and a large part of the country's territory remains beyond the Government's reach, especially in the north and east, areas which are in the hands of Kurdish militia. Moreover, armed groups that manage to escape Idlib could still find refuge north of Aleppo. Therefore, as we have said before, civilians must not be made to suffer from a scorched earth policy.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, as has been stressed, 2 million people in Idlib are in a vulnerable situation and require humanitarian assistance. In that context, a major attack could be more lethal and destructive than any other that has been launched during this conflict, which has already claimed the lives of more than 500,000 people since 2011.

Despite that difficult operational environment, my delegation is pleased that the United Nations and its partners are continuing to deliver regular humanitarian assistance to Idlib from across the border in Turkey. Furthermore, under such challenging circumstances, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners must not lose sight of the need for cross-border assistance to be prioritized so that humanitarian assistance can be delivered efficiently and effectively.

I would like to conclude by reiterating once again the need for all parties to the conflict to exercise restraint and respect their obligations under human rights law and humanitarian law to safeguard civilian lives and protect civilian infrastructure, as well as United Nations personnel and humanitarian actors, in accordance with resolution 2139 (2014).

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, I wish to extend our sincerest condolences to our colleagues and friends of the Russian delegation with regard to the tragedy of the downing of the aircraft that had military personnel on board. We are deeply troubled by that tragedy, and we extend our deepest condolences to the families and loved ones of the dead, as well as the colleagues of those who died.

(*spoke in English*)

We thank Special Envoy De Mistura and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for their comprehensive and very informative briefings. It is gratifying to learn that, despite the problems with regard to Idlib, we have made substantial progress in the political process towards resolving the conflict.

Kazakhstan is pleased to note that the work carried out by the guarantors is undoubtedly aimed at preventing escalation in Idlib, because no one wants war. In that regard, Kazakhstan welcomes the memorandum signed on 17 September in Sochi by the Defence Ministries of Russia and Turkey on the stabilization of the situation in the de-escalation zone of Idlib in Syria. We

support the creation of a demilitarized buffer zone in Syria's Idlib province to separate Government forces from rebel fighters based there. We commend Turkey and Russia on the breakthrough decision to enforce the demilitarized zone by 15 October. Now we look forward to the implementation of the agreement by all parties engaged in the deal. We commend the Special Envoy's attempts to involve various States of the Middle East, the Gulf region and Europe in the process. We welcome his consultations on 14 September in Geneva with the delegations of the so-called small group to facilitate the broader dimension of our collective effort. Although that meeting did not end in tangible results, such consultations should be continued, as they are a clear confirmation that the world community intends to find a peaceful way out of the Syrian crisis. Likewise, an innovative regional paradigm is needed to support both the Geneva and Astana processes in order to uphold the ceasefire and promote the peace process. We note with satisfaction the fact that the negotiations in Geneva agreed on the number of candidates for the constitutional committee. We support Mr. De Mistura's efforts to proceed with the launch of the work of that important body.

The situation in Syria is very difficult. Like the guarantors of the Astana process, we all need to make every effort to ensure that the civilian population does not suffer because of the struggle that must be continued against terrorist organizations. We also urge all sides to act with prudence with regard to the so-called threat of the use of chemical weapons, by either side so as to avert any further political or humanitarian crises.

We highly commend the visit of Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock to Damascus on 28 August to engage with the Government of Syria on how best to further scale up the collective humanitarian response. We call on the international community to provide additional financial support and the resources that are urgently needed to respond to a potential military escalation in the north-west of the country.

Kazakhstan is concerned about the safety and protection of civilians in Syria's rural Deir ez-Zor governorate, where fighting has displaced more than 20,000 people since July. As we know, recently 53 people were killed and 100 injured in air strikes on residential areas in the Abu Kamal district. Internally displaced people have settled in makeshift camps in the governorate and are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. Nearly 200,000 displaced people have returned to Deir ez-Zor since November 2017. We commend the United Nations on its efforts to ensure safe access for humanitarian aid workers so as to reach people in need. We call on all sides not to block aid and to make every effort to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Lastly, analysing events in recent days, Astana assesses that developments in the situation in Syria have created the basis for a qualitative change for the better — the final elimination of terrorists on the territory of the country, the beginning of a real political process, the revival of economic activity and the return of refugees to their homeland.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): First of all, my delegation would also like to extend its sincere condolences to the Russian Federation following the incident that occurred yesterday in Syria.

My delegation welcomes today's briefing on the political process and the humanitarian situation in Syria under your presidency, Sir, and thanks Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for their informative briefings on the latest developments in Syria.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, my delegation welcomes the multifaceted assistance that United Nations agencies, funds and programmes continue to provide to people in distress in the areas affected by armed clashes, despite ongoing hostilities. The plight of those people is all the more worrying as they are also exposed to risks caused by the presence of explosive remnants of war and landmines. In addition, several staff members of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations specialized in the provision of humanitarian aid also pay with their lives for their commitment to assisting people affected by the conflict. Reports to date reveal that 22 United Nations agency staff members have been killed, including 18 from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. As for non-governmental organizations, 74 Syrian and Palestinian Red Crescent staff and volunteers have made the ultimate sacrifice.

My delegation remains convinced that a possible offensive by the Syrian armed forces in Idlib will have unprecedented humanitarian consequences, which will cause another mass exodus, thereby adding to

the suffering of a population martyred by seven years of particularly deadly conflict. We are extremely concerned about the increasing risk of a humanitarian disaster in Idlib governorate, which hosts nearly 3 million people, including 1.4 million internally displaced persons. Those people have no choice but to take refuge in overcrowded camps, where basic services are struggling to meet their immense needs. Côte d'Ivoire therefore urges the parties to the conflict to show restraint and take the necessary measures to ensure safe, sustainable and unhindered access for humanitarian assistance in order to avoid another tragedy, such as that experienced in eastern Ghouta, Aleppo and Homs.

My country recalls that the warring parties cannot evade their obligations to protect civilians and civilian objects, in accordance with the relevant provisions of international law. We therefore call upon them to take all the measures necessary to spare schools, hospitals and medical personnel during military operations. My country also takes this opportunity to reiterate its commitment to the principle of accountability. To that end, my delegation urges all parties, including States, civil society and United Nations agencies, to cooperate fully with the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

On the political front, my country welcomes the sustained efforts of Mr. De Mistura to reach a political solution, which is the only way out of the current impasse. In that regard, we welcome the meetings organized by the Special Envoy last week in Geneva among the guarantors of the Astana process to discuss the establishment of the constitutional committee and among the representatives of the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan to discuss issues related to the political process and the establishment of the electoral committee. Côte d'Ivoire urges all parties to support the Special Envoy in his quest for a lasting political solution to the Syrian conflict. Lastly, we call on the warring parties to opt for the path of dialogue, as stipulated in resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to begin by expressing our deepest condolences following the tragic death yesterday of Russian aircraft servicemen, as well as to extend our sympathy to their loved ones.

I thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for their briefings. China appreciates their efforts to promote the Syrian political process and alleviate the humanitarian situation in the country.

The international community has closely followed the situation in Idlib for quite some time. China welcomes the joint statement issued by the leaders of the Russian Federation, Turkey and Iran on 7 September. We applaud the meeting held between Russian and Turkish leaders in Sochi on 17 September and the signing of the memorandum on the supervision of the de-escalation zone in Idlib. China supports all efforts to ease the situation and advance the Syrian political settlement process. Going forward, all parties with influence should seek to work together to activate it and ensure that the joint statement and memorandum are fully implemented in order to facilitate the ceasefire and the cessation of hostilities. That would in turn foster favourable external conditions for dialogue, peace talks and a political settlement to the situation in Syria. The international community should forge synergies in order to continue fighting terrorism, while building on the counter-terrorism gains made in Syria and preventing terrorist organizations from abducting and coercing civilians.

A political solution is the only way to lasting peace and stability in Syria. Last week Special Envoy De Mistura conducted in-depth consultations with the Syrian parties on the establishment of the constitutional committee. The international community should continue to support the United Nations as the main mediation channel, as well as the role played by the Geneva peace talks and the Astana process. It should also push the Syrian parties to effectively implement resolution 2254 (2015), in line with the principle of a Syrian-owned, Syrian-led process in search of a political solution that responds to the realities on the ground in Syria and accommodates the concerns of all parties through inclusive political dialogue. All parties are duty-bound to adhere to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and other recognized basic norms governing international relations and to fully respect Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity.

China is deeply concerned about the developments in Syria and its humanitarian situation. Despite the myriad challenges, the Syrian people are repairing roads, restoring power and rebuilding hospitals, schools and other infrastructure. The number of refugees and displaced persons returning to their homes is steadily on the rise. Only through steady progress in rebuilding can we bring hope to the Syrian people and help secure long-term stability and peace in Syria.

The international community should actively support the reconstruction of Syria, including through intensified efforts to clear explosive remnants of war, so as to create conditions for the return of refugees and displaced persons. The Syrian parties should proceed by taking into account the future of the country and the well-being of the people, abide by relevant Council resolutions, resolve their differences through dialogue and consultations and alleviate the humanitarian situation without delay.

The United Nations and the international community should strengthen communication and coordination with the Syrian Government in providing assistance to all areas in need in Syria. The humanitarian relief efforts in Syria should adhere to the principles of neutrality, impartiality and apoliticality.

In recent years, China has provided substantial assistance to alleviate the humanitarian situation in Syria and neighbouring countries affected by the crisis. In August, the Red Cross Society of China provided Syria with mobile medical units, including two medical buses and two ambulances. It also handed over to to the host a prosthetic rehabilitation centre for Syrian children, built with the assistance of China. China will continue to provide assistance to Syria and its neighbours to the best of our ability.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to thank both briefers for their comprehens, yet again very worrying, updates. Like many others around the table, we share a sense of urgency while talking about the current developments in Syria, where the conflict is far from its end. Allow me also to join others in expressing our sincere condolences to the Russian Mission.

Let me today focus on two aspects of the conflict — the internal and the external.

First, while talking about the internal dimension of the conflict, we cannot acknowledge that things are normalizing. Even though last Sunday — for the first time since 2011 — local elections were held, we have to underline that not everyone could participate in them. We have to keep in mind the lack of participation by internally displaced persons (IDPs) and Syrian refugees. Therefore, in our opinion, those elections might not fully reflect the reality of Syria today.

As there is no military solution to the conflict, we have always underlined that we should aim at reaching an intra-Syrian framework for a political agreement on a transition in line with resolution 2254 (2015). It is for the Syrians themselves to negotiate, and that is why we desperately need to revive the United Nations political process in Geneva. Only a real, tangible political process, which would ensure true representation of the Syrian people, would provide the setting of a timetable and procedures for the drafting of a constitution and conducting United Nations-supervised free and fair elections.

In that context, let me express our strong support for the Syrian-led inclusive constitutional committee under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva. It should be implemented as a priority now. It requires the full and constructive engagement of all parties to the conflict, especially the Syrian authorities, to participate in the negotiations in good faith and without preconditions.

It is also important to note that a cessation of hostilities may also give the peace talks under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva the opportunity to gain momentum, so that a political solution might be finally reached. For that reason, we call upon all parties to fulfil their commitments to the existing ceasefire agreements.

Secondly, with regard to the external dimension of the crisis, we need to discuss the political and humanitarian situation in Syria today, although the military offensive in Syria continues. As a consequence, human suffering is growing. Any action, taken by anyone — but especially by the Astana guarantors — even against terrorists, cannot justify the attacks on innocent civilians and civilian infrastructure, including health facilities. All parties to the conflict are obliged under international humanitarian law not to attack civilians and civilian infrastructure and to take all possible measures to protect civilians. There is a special role for Russia, Turkey and Iran in that regard.

We are extremely worried about the escalation of hostilities in the Idlib governorate. That region is

one of the de-escalation zones in Syria, which was established and is overseen by the guarantors of the Astana process with an aim to ensure the ceasefire and humanitarian access.

We welcome the agreement reached between Russia and Turkey in Sochi yesterday, which is thought to have averted an all-out offensive by the Government forces to retake the last remaining opposition stronghold in Idlib. Considering it as a move in the right direction towards avoiding a humanitarian catastrophe, we urge all parties to the conflict to ensure the full implementation of the agreement.

We are deeply concerned about the severe situation of the most vulnerable victims of the conflict — especially children, women and members of religious minorities, as well as IDPs. Those groups currently constitute half of the population of Idlib. If not protected, we are risking a humanitarian catastrophe that might also include a serious risk of sexual violence. We call upon all to alleviate the suffering of civilians by granting them free and safe access to humanitarian assistance, including voluntary medical evacuation, which should strictly be overseen by the United Nations and the implementing partners, based only on medical needs, in order to ensure the voluntary character of the process.

In conclusion, let me stress the necessity of maintaining unity as well as the responsibility in the Security Council on the question of the full implementation of the humanitarian resolution (resolution 2401 (2018)) across Syria. All parties to the conflict should exercise restraint and prioritize the protection of civilians. We call on all stakeholders with influence on the ground, especially Russia, Turkey and Iran, to take the necessary steps to ensure that the fighting stops and the Syrian people are protected.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we express our condolences to Russia for those who lost their lives yesterday in Syria.

We appreciate the convening of this meeting, and we are grateful to Mr. De Mistura and Mr. Lowcock for their briefings and work. We acknowledge and support their efforts to achieve a political solution to the conflict in Syria and to protect the civilian population.

Peru notes with regret and deep concern the continuation of the conflict and the grave humanitarian situation. We regret the suffering and the high level of vulnerability of millions of people, as well as the evident disdain of the parties to the conflict for international law and international humanitarian law. As previously pointed out, it is essential to prevent Idlib from becoming a new site of humanitarian tragedy or a major factor of instability.

Peru strongly condemns terrorism and considers it necessary that the remaining terrorist groups in Idlib and in other areas of Syria be held accountable. We also recognize the need to safeguard the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. However, in no way should that be interpreted as justification for putting the lives of millions of people at risk. On the contrary, the situation leads us to emphasize that there is no military solution to the conflict. In that regard, we would like to welcome the announcement of the Presidents of the Russian Federation and Turkey concerning the establishment of a demilitarized zone, which indeed includes the distinguishing and the separation of terrorists from other rebel groups and the civilian population. We also wish to acknowledge the intense efforts that the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General has been carrying out in that vein, in particular the recent meeting he convened in Geneva with the so-called small group.

We encourage all parties to maintain a constructive and committed spirit, with a view to protecting the civilian population throughout the Syrian territory, and to advance the political process based on resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/512, annex). With regard to the latter, we underscore the need to accelerate the implementation of an inclusive and representative constitutional committee, especially with respect to Syrian women. And we welcome the progress in that regard that the Special Envoy has made known to us.

We also highlight the need to accelerate the process of releasing prisoners, of identifying missing persons and of handing over human remains to relatives. Furthermore, we underscore the need to guarantee immediate, safe and unrestricted access to humanitarian assistance from the United Nations and other specialized agencies. That includes cross-border assistance, which in the current context is essential for the survival of millions of people.

Finally, we must not forget the need to address the situation of the millions of displaced persons and to consider that the achievement of sustainable peace in

Syria necessitates their ability to return to their homes, properties and businesses voluntarily, under safe conditions and in a dignified manner.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): Allow me, first of all, to join other colleagues in expressing our sincere condolences to the Russian Federation.

We thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for their briefings on the Syrian political and humanitarian track. We reiterate our support for the continued diplomatic endeavours of the Special Envoy to facilitate a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis. We also appreciate the United Nations and its humanitarian partners for continuing to provide aid to millions of Syrians under difficult circumstances.

We have been expressing our concern about the humanitarian consequences of a further military escalation in Idlib and its surrounding areas. As it has been mentioned repeatedly, there are close to 3 million people residing in that area; and 2.1 million are already in need of humanitarian assistance. In addition, 1.4 million are internally displaced. Therefore, a further military escalation would endanger millions of civilians and severely affect the ability of the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to deliver aid, leading to further loss of lives as well as displacement. That is why the Secretary- General made an appeal last week to avoid a full-scale battle in Idlib, as it would unleash a humanitarian nightmare.

While we worry about the fate of civilians, we also understand that there are United Nations-listed terrorists who must be defeated with enhanced international cooperation and coordination. Therefore, as the Secretary-General underlined, it is vital to spare no effort to find solutions that protect civilians in Idlib. At such critical times, we believe it is imperative to do everything possible to demonstrate the primacy of diplomacy.

In that regard, we welcome that the meeting between the Presidents of Russia and Turkey held in Sochi resulted in an agreement to establish a demilitarized zone. While expressing our appreciation to both countries, we hope that their agreement will protect civilians and avoid the worst scenario, which both the Special Envoy and the Humanitarian Coordinator have been warning of repeatedly. We encourage the Astana guarantors, particularly Russia and Turkey, to continue to work together to find a sustainable solution to the situation. We also believe their efforts should be supported by all States that have influence over local actors in Syria.

As we continue to advocate for a durable solution to the Idlib situation, it is also absolutely imperative to support the humanitarian programmes of the United Nations and its partners. The humanitarian tragedy in Idlib and other parts of Syria continue to require safe, rapid and sustained humanitarian access. As the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/845) mentions, all methods of aid delivery are essential to the efficient and effective provision of humanitarian assistance and to ensuring a needs-based response. In that connection, we welcome the visit of the Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria on 28 August. We hope his meetings with the Syrian Government and other stakeholders will bring about tangible results that improve humanitarian access to enable the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to provide aid to all Syrians based on needs.

While we all have been rightly focusing on the urgent situation in Idlib, we all also agree that both the crisis in Idlib and the whole of Syria cannot be addressed without a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led comprehensive political process facilitated by the United Nations. Hence we support the continued efforts of the Special Envoy. We acknowledge the consultations he mentioned having last week on the constitutional committee with the Astana guarantors and the members of the small group. In that regard, we underscore that all Syrians parties and those States with influence should support the efforts of the Special Envoy to finalize the establishment of the constitutional committee, which is critical to relaunching the intra-Syrian political talks.

In conclusion, there is no military solution to the Syrian crisis. Only political solution, facilitated by the United Nations, can meet the legitimate aspirations of the people of Syria. As the Secretary-General reminded us in his latest report, the only goal of the United Nations efforts — which is to end the suffering of Syrians — should be shared by all of us. At this very critical time, the Council should extend its backing to the Special Envoy as he continues his tireless efforts to end the Syrian crisis through an inclusive political process based on resolution 2254 (2015).

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): I would like to thank both Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Special Envoy De Mistura for their respective briefings. Let me also express our thanks

to all those United Nations and other humanitarian aid workers who are providing life-saving aid to those most in need. We salute their selfless and brave work in dire circumstances.

I would also like to join others in offering our condolences to Russia and the families of those who lost their lives in the downing of a military plane. It adds to the long list of casualties that this conflict has caused and underscores the need for a political solution.

Despite the relative calm of the past few days, the situation in and around Idlib remains extremely tense. Everything needs to be done to prevent an all-out offensive. The agreement between Russia and Turkey on a demilitarized zone around Idlib seems a step in that direction.

I would like to focus on the following points: the need for further de-escalation in Idlib; the need to revive the political process and to form the constitutional committee; the need to deliver impartial humanitarian aid and the reasons why it is not the right time for reconstruction aid at this moment.

On the need for de-escalation in Idlib, the Kingdom of the Netherlands once again underlines that further escalation of violence in Idlib could lead to an international confrontation and a humanitarian catastrophe. Some of the 2.9 million civilians inside Idlib have already been on the move in the past few days.

Yesterday in Sochi, an agreement was reached on a 15- to 25-kilometre-wide demilitarized zone. Chances of a military confrontation between the regime and opposition groups have been reduced significantly. Still, some questions remain. What happens until the moment the deal comes into force, supposedly on 15 October? Can Russia and Turkey guarantee that civilians will not be forced to move from their homes? Will there be access for humanitarian aid delivery to people living in the demilitarized zone? We would appreciate clarification from Russia on those questions.

There is consensus in the Security Council on the need to counter terrorism of Council-designated terrorist groups. The protection of civilians should be at the core of every possible plan. We reiterate that combating terrorism is no excuse to attack without distinction, proportionality or precaution. We support efforts to separate terrorists from civilians, to prevent terrorists from using civilians as human shields. We call on all parties to ensure full respect for international humanitarian law, and to refrain from any attacks on basic services and hospitals. The Syrian army and the Russian air force have the coordinates of the hospitals. All attacks that have already taken place, as well as those that might still take place in the future, fall under their responsibility, and accountability needs to take place.

On the need to revive the political process and form the constitutional committee, we welcome the progress with regard to the establishment of the constitutional committee. It is not a goal in itself but is part of the broader political process based on resolution 2254 (2015). One can speak only of a credible political process when the constitutional committee itself is credible. That means there is a need for inclusiveness and representation of all Syrians. We reiterate that the Special Envoy must have the freedom to compile the so-called third list. It should not require negotiation with States. We repeat our support for the Special Envoy's commitment to have 30 per cent female representation in all parts of the constitutional com mittee.The United Nations should set a date for the first meeting of the constitutional committee and move ahead with creating a new constitution. We look forward to hearing back from the United Nations on its progress by 31 October.

On the need to deliver impartial humanitarian aid, unimpeded and unconditional access for principled humanitarian assistance — both cross-border and cross-line — remains an absolute necessity. The 2.9 million citizens in Idlib must be protected and their needs need to be met. We welcome the United Nations action plan. It is of the utmost importance that it now be quickly financed and operationalized. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is willing to do its part. It is essential that the United Nations remains operative and has free access to enable efficient humanitarian aid throughout Syria. We repeat our call to the Syrian authorities, Russia and Iran to immediately improve independent and free access for all humanitarian organizations.

The regime makes independent needs assessments, coordination and reporting by the United Nations impossible; however, those are conditions for needs-based financing. We repeat our scepticism about the concept of humanitarian corridors or other evacuations of civilians and moderate fighters from Idlib, as proposed by the regime and Russia. First, there must be clarity on the evacuation process, destinations, monitoring by the United Nations and guaranteed access to satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene,

health, safety and nutrition. Evacuations should always be voluntary and should never be used for political or demographic purposes.

Let me conclude by condemning the current call for reconstruction aid and the call for the return of refugees. There will be no reconstruction aid for Syria until there is a lasting political transition in Syria. It is also inconceivable that we start rebuilding when a massive attack still looms around Idlib. Syria currently is not ready for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees. Contrary to what some want to make us believe, it is not the lack of reconstruction that keeps people from returning. Many Syrians cannot go back for fear of violence, persecution and imprisonment. Those Syrians fear security screenings and forced conscription and, last but not least, they have no homes to return to, due to the potential consequences of laws such as Law Number 10. It is clear that fundamental structural changes are needed in Syria's Administration. An inclusive political transition must be the starting point.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): Welcome you back to New York, Mr. President. I thank our two briefers, the Special Envoy and the Under-Secretary-General. Let me also repeat the thanks of colleagues for everything their teams do on the ground to help the people of Syria, who need them more than ever. We are very conscious this is a very difficult job for them to do.

The conflict is seven and a half years old — it is longer than the Second World War. Over half a million people have died in Syria, millions have been displaced and chemical weapons have been used, including by the Syrian regime. I think we are running out of superlatives to describe the horrors of this conflict.

We meet every month on Syria in this Chamber, but this time does feel particularly important. The Turkish plan for Idlib, which its officials have discussed with the Russians, is the crux. It needs to be developed and implemented and, as other speakers have said, Russia in particular needs to uphold it. We look to Russia to do that because Russia is one of the five permanent members of the Security Council, with particular responsibilities for international peace and security. Russian needs to exert its influence on the Syrian authorities, otherwise the crimes that are committed against the Syrian people are committed in Russia's name. We heard earlier about the voices of Idlib. There are 3 million voices in Idlib who will want to know why the Idlib plan cannot be implemented. There are 18 million voices in Syria who want the Council to act to protect them.

A lot has been said today, some of it very familiar or common to those Council members who have spoken. I will not repeat some of the assessments, but I would like to go on record as saying that the United Kingdom agrees with our American, Dutch, Swedish, Polish and other partners in their assessments. We wholly agree with them.

I want to highlight in particular four points: first of all, I want to agree with what the representative of France said about the situation on the ground, but also what he said about the French, Americans and British taking our responsibilities if chemical weapons are ever used again. I want to talk about the political process: we want to see the constitutional committee convened. We look to the Special Envoy to do that. We believe he has all the authority he needs to pick the names and we trust him to do the best he can in the interests of the people of Syria and in the interest of peace. We look for a date at to be set and we ask him to report back to the Council by 31 October. We look to the small group and the Astana group to make progress on coming together in support of the United Nations. I agree with what my Dutch and Swedish colleagues said about reconstruction money. There are 3 million voices in Idlib, and 18 million voices in Syria as a whole, who will want to know why progress cannot be made on the political track.

Turning to the humanitarian front, we would like to hear from the Syrian representative why there are still problems with access and why there are still problems with safe passage, as mentioned by the Under-Secretary-General. I note what the representative of Equatorial Guinea said about scorched earth. It is a truly terrible situation, but he is right to draw attention to it. We would like to know what the Syrian regime is doing to put that right. A large number of speakers talked about international humanitarian law and the principles of precaution, discrimination and proportionality. The United Kingdom absolutely upholds those principles. It is unbelievable that hospitals are being attacked, and even more unbelievable given that they are part of a deconflicted area. Last week, the United Kingdom announced approximately $40 million for Idlib. We hope that will help, but I want to go back to what the Under-Secretary-General asked — is it a reprieve or a stay of execution? It is a dreadful choice, but it has to be a reprieve. There are 3 million voices in Idlib and

18 million voices in Syria who will want to know why this cannot happen.

Turning to the wider issues, as awful and horrific as the Syrian conflict is, the prospect of a wider, inter-State war is waiting in the wings. The Syrian people are not only being attacked by their own Government, they risk being drawn in and becoming the victims of a wider conflict. It is not legitimate to use the territory of Syria to fire missiles at Israel. The risk of miscalculation and misunderstanding that led to the downing of a Russian aircraft encapsulates, on a small scale, the much bigger and even more frightening risk of a wider miscalculation.

In that regard, I would like to echo other colleagues who have voiced their condolences to our Russian colleagues for the loss of their air crew. I repeat, however, that the risk of miscalculation is incredibly high. It was the Syrian Arab air force that shot down the Russian plane, and the proximate cause was the actions of Iran and Hizbullah on the ground. That ought to serve as a very powerful warning, not just to the Syrian authorities but also to the Russians and the Iranians of the prospect of something much wider and even more horrible than we have seen thus far in Syria.

Lastly, the Special Envoy referred to Kofi Annan, and we will have a tribute to Mr. Annan in the United Nations later this week. This morning, a wreath was laid to Dag Hammarskjöld, who is also one of the iconic Secretaries-General whom the United Nations has been fortunate enough to have lead it. We do them no credit if we allow this conflict to continue. In 2012, I was present for the historic Geneva II Conference on Syria. The best legacy we can offer Mr. Annan in response to all his work is to bring the Syrian conflict to an end and help the Syrian people.

Mrs. Cordova Soria (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for their informative briefings. My delegation reiterate its appreciation and support for their sensitive work.

We also express our condolences to the Government and the people of Russia for the loss of lives during yesterday's incident.

We are meeting once again to discuss the sensitive issue of the current and future situation of the Syrian people. However, we stress that, according to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/845), military activity in the south-west has decreased as a result of the Government recovering territory held by armed groups and its consolidation of control in that region. However, we insist that the parties must respect their obligations under international law, particularly international humanitarian law, in order to ensure the protection of civilians, hospitals and educational institutions, as well as to protect the workers of the various humanitarian agencies on the ground.

Part of that protection must go hand in hand with the prompt and active clearance of explosive remnants of war throughout Syrian territory, beginning with densely populated areas. We consider that to be an urgent and fundamental action, since those remnants pose a risk to medical and humanitarian personnel and, most critically, to the civilians who are returning to their places of origin.

We underscore that in eastern Ghouta during the latest reporting period, according to the Secretary-General's most recent report, many displaced persons were able to return to their homes and resume their normal lives and even commercial activities. We also note that, according to the report, the humanitarian agencies of the United Nations have been able to reach more than 2.37 million people with food assistance, as well as with medicines to some hard-to-reach areas. We stress the need to include in the agenda the release of people detained and kidnapped by terrorist groups, as well as the identification of the bodies of victims of violence in the conflict.

We insist on the need to ensure the protection of the 2.1 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in the province of Idlib, including the 1.4 million internally displaced persons. We also reiterate our deep concern about the possible escalation of violence in Idlib governorate, where there are approximately 3 million people, including the regrettable presence of almost 80,000 members of non-State armed groups and terrorist groups, designated as such by the Council. Bolivia takes this opportunity to reiterate its categorical rejection of all acts of terrorism as criminal and unjustifiable, wherever, whenever and by whomever it is committed.

We believe that any effort or measure taken within the framework of resolution 2401 (2018) that provides for the fight against terrorist groups designated by the Council, or other armed groups, in order to separate

them from the civilian population must also consider the protection of civilian lives under international law. In that connection, we welcome the agreement reached hours ago at the highest levels between Russia and Turkey in Sochi. That agreement will enable the removal of all radical combatants from Idlib, including the Al-Nusra Front, which has links to Al-Qaida, and heavy weaponry belonging to all armed groups.

We highlight the initiatives of the Astana guarantors to reduce violence throughout the Syrian territory. That is why we must strengthen the Astana agreements, one of the international initiatives that helped to reduce violence and facilitate peace and stability in Syria. In that regard, we call upon the parties to continue working for the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018), while highlighting once again that those local agreements helped not only to reduce violence and allow the evacuation of people in need, but also to facilitate the arrival of humanitarian assistance. We hope that those agreements will continue with the aim of allowing access for convoys, including cross-border convoys, emergency medical evacuations and humanitarian corridors that will enable the voluntary, unhindered, dignified and safe movement of civilians to their places of origin.

We reiterate our support for the efforts of Special Envoy De Mistura and for his talks with the various stakeholders in the framework of the high-level diplomacy. We repeat that the Syrian conflict has no military solution, and we therefore reject any attempt at break-up or sectarianism in the country. On the contrary, we wish to state that the solution is to sustain and implement the Sochi final declaration, whose main aim is the establishment of a constitutional committee. We hope that Mr. De Mistura's efforts in that regard will bear fruit.

Within the framework of the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and respect for the principle of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, we call for the resolution of this conflict through an inclusive political process, based on dialogue and consultations, led by and for the Syrian people and allowing for a peaceful and sustainable solution to the situation within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva process.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, I should like to extend our gratitude to all of those delegations that have voiced their condolences in connection with the tragedy that occurred yesterday in the skies over Syria.

We thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura and Mr. Mark Lowcock for their briefings.

Yesterday, in Sochi, yet another historic milestone was achieved with respect to developments in the situation in Syria, namely, the Russian-Turkish summit, which resulted in the signing of a memorandum on stabilizing the situation in the Idlib de-escalation zone. Together with our Turkish partners, we will submit that document for distribution as an official document of the Security Council.

Key components of the memorandum include maintenance of the de-escalation zone and the establishment within it a demilitarized zone that will help carry out focused work to ensure a sustained cessation of hostilities. At the same time, it confirms the determination to continue fighting terrorism in Syria in all its forms and manifestations. Uncompromising and consistent struggle against terrorism remains among the chief obligations of all States Members of the United Nations.

The document is a confirmation that Russia, together with other Astana guarantors, continues to undertake tremendous efforts to ensure that the situation around Idlib will be resolved through negotiations and that the civilian population will not suffer, as we described to our partners and have been describing all of this time. Efforts aimed at seeking an optimal solution will continue. Regardless of what some may state due to envy or from mere impotence, the Astana format remains a functional and effective mechanism. We thank our Kazakh colleagues for their contribution to its establishment.

On the whole, our view is that the situation on the ground has set the stage for a meaningful political process. That, too, is largely to the credit of the Astana trio. We will persevere in our efforts aimed at facilitating the establishment of a constitutional committee made up of representatives of the Syrian leadership, opposition forces and civil society. The challenge and objective is to ensure the beginning of the committee's work as soon as possible.

We call for attempts at destructive intervention in this sensitive process to be abandoned and for attempts to impose contrived, ill-conceived configurations to be set aside. They only slow down the formulation of

balanced solutions and undermine the achievement of a sustained, lasting settlement.

I wish to tell Mr. De Mistura that it is perhaps not worth using the Security Council to exert pressure on the guarantors. They are doing more for the political process than anybody present in the Chamber. It is important for him to facilitate — and not to lead — the process. Syrian decisions need to be owned by the Syrian people themselves, as is stipulated under resolution 2254 (2015), to which we all, including Mr. De Mistura, frequently refer.

We call upon all those who do not intend to make progress on scenarios in a way that runs counter to the genuine desires of the Syrian people, who do not intend to embroil themselves in political engineering, to help, or at least not obstruct, the activities of the guarantor countries of the Astana process designed to launch what is necessary for Syria, the Middle East region and the entire international community, namely, a comprehensive political process based on the decisions of the Congress of the Syrian National Dialogue in Sochi and Security Council resolutions on Syria.

Our approaches to tackling humanitarian issues in Syria remain unchanged. We believe that it is unseemly, to put it mildly, to selectively approach the delivery of assistance to the Syrian population. It is unacceptable to blatantly politicize issues pertaining to the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the rebuilding of what was destroyed by terrorists, upholding the inalienable right of refugees and internally displaced persons to return to their homes.

Unfortunately, unbalanced policies in Syrian affairs emerge more often than not. In particular, having read the report of the Secretary-General on the humanitarian situation in Syria, we have been unable to find anything about issues pertaining to access by humanitarian workers to a number of areas beyond the control of Damascus, including those occupied by the coalition in breach of Syria's sovereignty. There has been no mention of what took place, and what continues to take place, in Raqqa. Yet it is known that the bodies of the dead are still being retrieved from under the rubble after the so-called coalition razed the city to the ground, having liberated it from terrorists and, while they were at it, from civilians. I do not recall a call for the protection of refugees being issued at that time. Apparently, some have a selective approach to humanitarian affairs.

There has been no progress in delivering vital supplies to the residents of the Rukban camp, which is located in an enclosed zone around the United States At Tanf military base. Indeed, Mr. Lowcock mentioned both Raqqa and Rukban in his briefing. Once again, we would draw attention to the fact that the value of the conduct of cross-border operations in the light of developments on the ground has been exaggerated. This is a mechanism that has been introduced as an extraordinary measure. It is not transparent and blatantly undermines Syria's sovereignty. It is important to move towards its eventual drawdown. It is also important to promptly rebuild the Syrian economy, and especially areas most severely affected by the hostilities there. It is necessary to eschew double standards and politically tinged conditions. Many reject such approaches. That was confirmed during last week's sixtieth annual Damascus International Fair with the participation of official representatives and companies from 48 States.

It is high time to acknowledge the fact that unilateral sanctions imposed by a number of States undermine, not the regime, as they have called it, but are detrimental above all to ordinary Syrian citizens. This is a vicious and counterproductive practice, not only in the Syrian context but in other contexts as well.

The Russian Federation will continue to provide assistance to Syria on the political and humanitarian fronts. With the assistance of the Russian Centre for Refugee Reception, Distribution and Settlement, Syrians continue to return from Lebanon and Jordan. Overall, since 18 July, approximately 13,500 refugees have returned to Syria, and 243,000 people have returned since 30 September 2015. Furthermore, since 1 January, about 149,000 internally displaced persons have returned to their homes, and since 30 September 2015, 1.2 million people have returned.

Furthermore, the Syrian authorities are implementing socioeconomic measures geared towards generating momentum for rebuilding key infrastructure in the country. Those measures also aim to continue the delivery of comprehensive humanitarian assistance to civilians. Since September 2015, about 30,000 residential structures have been rebuilt or renovated, as well as more than 5,000 educational and 150 medical institutions. For our part, during that period, Russia organized and conducted 1,935 humanitarian operations, during which over 3,000 tons of food and basic necessities were provided and distributed. Russian

military medical personnel delivered assistance to approximately 93,500 Syrians.

Despite the general trend towards greater stabilization, the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic on the whole remains tense. Fighters continue to intensively shell Syrian army positions and residential areas in Government-controlled territory from the Idlib de-escalation zone. In August, there were 554 violations of the cessation-of-hostilities regime by illegal armed groups with the use of mortars, anti-aircraft and heavy machine guns, as a result of which 29 people were killed and 71 were wounded.

As a consequence of terrorist bombardments, civilians continue to perish. On 7 September, terrorists using multiple-launch rocket systems in Maharda killed nine civilians, including five women and three children. Approximately 30 people were wounded. On 13 September, when terrorists used improvised launchers in Aleppo, a child was killed and 13 people were injured.

At the same time, fighters continue to launch unmanned attack aerial vehicles in the direction of the Russian Khmeimim air base. Since July, Russian air defence has destroyed 58 such drones. In addition, the Idlib de-escalation zone fighters and White Helmet activists continue preparations with a view to staging the use of chemical weapons. There is information that such fabrications were already filmed in Jisr ash-Shagur and Khan Shaykhoun. Syrians, including [illegible] abducted from Idlib and Aleppo, were forced to participate. There is also evidence that the Al-Nusra Front recently provided barrels of chlorine to Jaysh [illegible] in Al-Lataminah, and Kafr Zita. We once again draw attention to that fact, about which we have repeatedly warned.

The fighters' activities are [illegible] led from abroad, and that is also being reinforced in the light of blatant disregard for Syria's sovereignty, which Damascus has a legitimate right to protect through the means available to it, by those who advocate a [illegible] ible peace process.

Facilitating extremists, [illegible] even indirectly, is unacceptable. We note that those who became involved in the Syrian crisis are finally realizing the mistake of relying on extremists. Some States have initiated relevant proceedings to clarify the role of certain [illegible] in supporting groups that had tarnished themselves by cooperating with terrorists and through their numerous violations of international humanitarian law. We hope that those proceedings will be carried through to their logical conclusion.

We heard concerns today that the Syrian conflict is liable to lead to more serious regional consequences. That is also a concern to us, and we see that some of our partners are using Syria as a springboard to unleash more dangerous conflict with far-reaching, unpredictable consequences. In that connection, we would like to call once again for genuinely collective efforts to be carried out with regard to all conflicts in the region, especially along counter-terrorism lines, and to abandon attempts to resolve issues in Syria behind Syria's back.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express my sincere condolences to my dear friend and colleague the Ambassador of the Russian Federation for yesterday's victims martyred as a result of the Israeli aggression against the city of Latakia. The martyrs of Russia in Syria are our martyrs. Their blood is our blood. We share the same enemy and the same victory against the same kind of terrorism. We, together with our allies, are partners in the counter-terrorism strategy in Syria, the region and the world in word and in deed.

We condemn Israel's most recent aggression against my country, which was carried out last night. It is part of Israel's aggressive policy and desperate attempt to provide moral support to terrorist groups following their defeat at the hands of the Syrian Arab Army and after cleansing the Syrian territories from their abomination. That comes after the repeated and continued provocative Israeli violations of the disengagement agreement of 1974 and the relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolution 350 (1974). My country calls on the Security Council once again to assume its responsibility in maintaining international peace and security and to immediately take the necessary and decisive measures to hold Israel accountable for its terrorism and its crimes, which constitute a flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and the provisions of international law.

I was deeply disappointed, but not surprised, to note that there was no mention of two elements in the briefings on the humanitarian and the political situation in Syria provided by the Under-Secretary-General and the Special Envoy. Neither of them mentioned the subversive Israeli role in Syria or the terrorist groups

operating in my country. That was despite the fact that my dear friend, Mr. De Mistura, knows well that we agreed in Geneva on four baskets that constitute our agenda, one of them is terrorism. Therefore, it is unacceptable that Mr. De Mistura and Mr. Lowcock do not mention either foreign or domestic terrorism, which is operative in my country. As Council members know, Israel attacked my country twice this week. However, it seems that some members of the Council were not aware of those two acts of Israeli aggression.

Some permanent Council members continue to disregard the information that we have been providing to the Council for more than seven and a half years. They continue to distort the facts. That is unprecedented. I will not do what the representatives of those States are doing. I will not fabricate stories. I will not make arbitrary accusations. And I will not use illegal ,desperate and miserable expressions. Rather, I will use the words of their officials and members of their Governments against them.

I would like to remind my colleague the representative of France of a statement made by Mr. Roland Dumas, former Minister for Foreign Affairs of France, on the French television channel La Chaîne Parlementaire in June 2013:

> "Just about two years ago, before the hostilities in Syria began, I happened to be in England ... where I met with British officials, some of them friends of mine, who had sought me out and told me that something was being planned for Syria ... that the United Kingdom was preparing a rebel invasion of Syria ... The operation was long in the making. It was arranged, conceived and organized with the very plain goal of removing the Syrian Government."

Mr. Dumas also said,

> "It is important to know, when it comes to this region, that the Syrian regime has anti-Israeli intentions. Consequently, everything that happens in the region [hinges on that]. The Prime Minister of Israel told me, 'We are trying to get along with the countries around us, but those with which we can't we will bring down'."

That happened in 2010, before the Arab Spring, the African Autumn and the Asian Summer.

(*spoke in French*)

That was another France. It was the France of François Mitterrand. It was the France of Dominique de Villepin. It was the France of Jean-Pierre Chevènement. And it was the France of Roland Dumas.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

That is one testimony. I will give the Council another one that is equally important. It is a statement made by Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, former Chief of Staff to United States Secretary of State Colin Powell. In a statement to the Real News Network on 11 September, just a couple of days ago, he stated,

> "Those who are calling for aggression against Syria are looking for any kind of excuse to justify such aggression. Syria will be their next target, after Iraq. Their ultimate goal would be to topple the Iranian Government."

Colonel Wilkerson went on to say,

> "My country, along with Britain and France, does not have any evidence that the Syrian Government used chemical weapons at any time in the past. Moreover, the United States intelligence officers, including those working illegally in Syri.., were not able to provide any evidence to substantiate their allegations. To the contrary, all available evidence points to the fact that terrorist groups were those that used chemical weapons and carried out such attacks."

That is yet another testimony.

(*spoke in English*)

Once again, it was a different America — that of Colin Powell and Colonel Wilkerson.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

Those Governments sought to start a war against my country, Syria, to force its Government to change its positions, policies and national identity in service of a new Middle East. According to that plan, new and warring countries will be established on religious, faith-based, sectarian and ethnic grounds, just like the Zionist project of a Jewish Israel, in order to deprive the Palestinian people of their right to creating their own independent State. After all, only Israel matters.

In order to protect the lives of Syrians, there must be cooperation with the Syrian Government

and support to counter terrorism, instead of allowing Western intelligence officers to support terrorist groups through the use of deceptive terms, including, for example, "moderate armed Syrian opposition", "non-State armed groups", "the Islamic Caliphate State" or "jihadist groups". None of those terms include the word "terrorist", as if there were no terrorism in Syria, only genetically modified moderate armed Syrian opposition. We have those from Uzbekistan, Turkistan, China, Chechnya, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Europe. However, they are all genetically modified armed Syrian opposition.

Let me read out a statement made last week by the French Foreign Minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, on the news channel BFM TV.

> "The attack by the Syrian army against Idlib might have direct implications for the security of Europe."

That statement was also confirmed by the representative of France a while ago. The Foreign Minister continued,

> "This threat might be the result of terrorists spreading out across the region and moving to Europe. This security threat will remain as long as there are many terrorists from Al-Qaida operating in this region. They number between 10,000 and 15,000 and might be a direct threat to the security of our region in the future."

I ask my colleague the representative of France: Why has the French Government continued to provide political cover for terrorist groups in Syria, despite the fact that such groups carried out attacks in Paris at the Bataclan theatre and in Nice?

I will provide another example, which might be of interest to my colleague the representative of the Netherlands. As my colleagues in the Council know, a few days ago our delegation provided them with some serious information that was published by the Dutch media. The Dutch Government has provided support, funding and logistical assistance to a number of terrorist groups in Syria, despite the fact that the Dutch Public Prosecutor designated them as terrorist groups affiliated with jihadist and Salafist groups. It seems that there is some disagreement between the Government and the Public Prosecutor of the Netherlands on that issue. I ask the representative of the Netherlands: Does such action by the Dutch Government not violate its responsibilities as a member of the Security Council, especially when it pertains to maintaining international peace and security?

To those who continue to boast about interfering in my country, I reiterate that we will keep working seriously to achieve a political solution through a Syrian-led dialogue, without foreign interference. Our priority throughout the political process will remain counter-terrorism, ensuring the return of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons, the start of the reconstruction and recovery process and liberating all remaining Syrian territories from terrorists and illegal occupying Powers.

In that regard, I would like to ask Mr. Lowcock, who strangely stated that he would need the approval of the Syrian Government to deliver humanitarian assistance to the Rukban camp: Why did he not mention that the United States occupying Power at the Al-Tanaf camp refused to allow humanitarian convoys to reach the Rukban camp and stipulated that aid convoys should be unloaded 10 kilometres away from the camp? Why did he not say that?

Pertaining to the constitutional committee, the Syrian Government has fulfilled its commitment, as stated by Mr. De Mistura that we have provided a list of participants.

The Syrian Government would like to thank Russia and Iran for the efforts of their Presidents during the most recent summit in Tehran. The Syrian Arab Republic welcomes the agreement reached on Idlib province, announced yesterday in the Russian city of Sochi. The Syrian Government underscores that the agreement was the result of intense consultations between the Syrian Arab Republic and the Russian Federation, with full coordination between the two countries. The Syrian Government is never the last to be consulted. No one can sidestep the Syrian Government in that regard.

The Syrian Arab Republic continues to welcome all initiatives to stop the bloodshed and restore stability and security in all areas affected by terrorism. We will continue our war against terrorism until we liberate all Syrian territories, whether through military action or local reconciliation agreements. Such agreements have proved to be successful in stopping the bloodshed and restoring stability and security in the areas concerned, while allowing refugees to return to their homes.

In response to the statement made by my colleague the British Ambassador, the agreement announced yesterday is time-bound with clear deadlines. The agreement is a part of previous agreements on de-escalation zones, established by the Astana process since the beginning of 2017. The Astana process has always been committed to respecting the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of the Syrian Arab Republic, while liberating all Syrian territories from terrorism, terrorists and illegal foreign military presence.

In conclusion, I would like to respond to my colleague the Permanent Representative of Britain, who asked what action "the Syrian regime" was taking to ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance. What kind of question is that? There is no representative of the Syrian regime in the Security Council, or at the United Nations. I am the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic. I would ask the representative of the United Kingdom not to address a question to a fictitious person. I do not know such a person, to whom I referred to as Godot the last time (see S/PV.8344). There is no representative of Syrian regime at the United Nations, there is a representative of the Syrian Arab Republic and there is the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic.

The President: I would like to remind speakers of our standard of a five-minute time limit for statements.

I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): At the outset, let me join others in offering our condolences to our Russian friends for their loss yesterday.

As the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation explained, the summit between the Turkish and Russian Presidents in Sochi yesterday focused on the situation in Idlib. I would also like to share our views on the outcome of the summit.

First, I would like to recall President Erdoğan's article in *The Wall Street Journal*, to which I referred here in the Chamber on 11 September (see S/PV.8347):

> "Idlib is the last exit before the toll. If the international community ... fails to take action now, not only innocent civilians but the entire world stands to pay the price."

With that awareness, President Erdoğan and President Putin met in Sochi yesterday. The summit was an expression of their determination to find a peaceful solution to address a major humanitarian disaster in Idlib. The summit offered an opportunity to discuss ways and means to implement the understanding reached in Tehran last Friday, in line with the Astana spirit of cooperation. The agreement reached in Sochi builds on the Astana de-escalation arrangement and aims to achieve the stabilization of the situation and preserve the de-escalation zone in Idlib; the creation of the necessary conditions to fight terrorism effectively, in line with international humanitarian law; the prevention of a humanitarian catastrophe; and paving the way for the advancement of the political process.

The memorandum of understanding, which we will circulate together with our Russian friends, was signed by the Turkish and Russian Defence Ministers yesterday and foresees the creation of a demilitarized zone. The two sides agreed to continue working on the details of that arrangement. In line with the memorandum of understanding, all heavy weaponry will be withdrawn from the zone by 10 October; all terrorist groups will be removed by 15 October; the existing Turkish observation posts will be fortified; Russia will take all the necessary measures to prevent military operations and attacks on Idlib; Turkey and Russia will conduct coordinated patrols on both sides of the demilitarized zone; the coordination centre for the Astana guarantors will be reinforced in order to strengthen the sustainability of the ceasefire regime; and additional measures will be taken to ensure the freedom of movement of people and goods.

In his briefing, Under-Secretary-General Lowcock once again depicted the dire humanitarian situation in Idlib. The memorandum of understanding primarily aims at averting the looming humanitarian tragedy that the people in Idlib are facing. That arrangement will not only prevent a military attack on Idlib, but also serve the ultimate goal of accelerating both the political process and the finding a negotiated solution in Syria.

As mentioned by Special Envoy De Mistura, efforts to finalize the constitutional committee are under way. Turkey hopes to see an acceleration of efforts for the establishment of an inclusive and credible committee, for the holding of free and fair elections under United Nations supervision and for the Syrian people's legitimate aspirations for a democratic future in line with resolution 2254 (2015) to be addressed. We reiterate our call to the Council and the overall international community to support our endeavours and expedite the political process. Our collective efforts to

fight terrorism will contribute to the creation of viable conditions to that end.

In Sochi, the Turkish and Russian Presidents reaffirmed their resolve to fight terrorism in Idlib and beyond. We will continue to combat all terrorist groups, including the Democratic Union Party and the Kurdish People's Protection Units, which seek to undermine the territorial integrity of Syria and represent a direct threat to Turkey's national security. That should be a common source of concern shared by all of us.

As I underlined before the Council on 11 September, the international community must shoulder its responsibility and throw its weight behind a political solution. Millions of Syrians who have suffered tremendously are putting their faith in us. They deserve a better future. They deserve to shape the future of their homeland. We should not, and cannot, fail them.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to begin by expressing our condolences to the Russian delegation over the loss of Russian lives in the recent tragic events in Syria.

I would also like to express my thanks and appreciation to Mr. De Mistura and Mr. Lowcock for their efforts, as well as their briefings today.

The Islamic Republic of Iran welcomes the agreement between Russia and Turkey to create a demilitarized buffer zone in the governorate of Idlib in Syria. The Sochi agreement is the result of intensive, responsible diplomacy over the past few weeks in Ankara and Damascus, followed by the Iran-Russia-Turkey summit in Tehran. The agreement is based on the Astana process principled approach and spirit in creating de-escalation zones in order to reduce the possibility of civilian casualties, while fighting terrorism.

Stopping violence and bloodshed, while eliminating terrorism in the area, is one the most basic and principled positions in Iran's foreign policy. As President Rouhani stressed during the Tehran summit, combating terrorism requires a comprehensive approach by taking into account all aspects of that unpleasant phenomenon. From that perspective, the fight against terrorism in Idlib is an integral part of the mission of restoring peace and stability to Syria, but that fight must not harm civilians.

The Russian-Turkish agreement is a step in the right direction. It is in line with the determination expressed by the Presidents of Iran, Russia and Turkey in Tehran to continue cooperating with a view to eliminating all terrorists, while taking into consideration the humanitarian aspects. As during the Tehran summit, the three leaders expressed their strong commitment to Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. That will enable Syria to restore its control over other parts of its territory. Like any other State, that is its inherent right.

The international community should welcome that agreement and positively contribute to its implementation. We hope that the agreement — within the framework of the positive and successful Astana process and in continuation of the recent Tehran summit and diplomatic efforts by Iran — will quickly help end disasters for the Syrian people and cleanse the country of violent elements, while taking into account humanitarian concerns.

Once again, we stress the need for the return of all refugees and internally displaced persons. That will undoubtedly contribute to the ceasefire and national dialogue and accelerate the reconciliation process; it is also critical in advancing a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process. The right to determine the future of Syria belongs exclusively to Syrians.

To that end, cooperation towards establishing and launching the work of the constitutional committee is critical. While Syria is passing through a critical stage in defeating terrorists and regaining its unity and territorial integrity, the international community should stand firm in breathing new life into the country. As the Islamic Republic of Iran supported Syria in defeating terrorists, it will play a constructive role in bringing peace and prosperity to the country.

In conclusion, with regard to the allegations of the United States representative, I must stress that they reflect onlly endeavours to cover up the failure of United States polices in Syria.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.